



A gull sits atop a post along a dock in Menemsha Basin in Chilmark Mass. on Sept. 23, 2022. CARLIN STIEHL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

From the Islands to Beacon Hill to push for housing funds

Former state economic development secretary **Dan O’Connell** returned to the State House last week. But this time he wasn’t there on official state business or as an emissary for the **Massachusetts Competitive Partnership**, the business group he used to lead.

O’Connell trekked to Beacon Hill on behalf of the residents of Martha’s Vineyard, where he lives now. He helped organize a 240-person-strong entourage from the Vineyard, along with about 60 from Nantucket. They were there to make the case for new fees on real estate transfers to raise money for affordable housing.

In the Vineyard's case, the group is pushing for the Legislature to approve a new 2-percent fee on real estate transactions above \$1 million. The six Vineyard towns would use the money for an affordable housing "bank" to subsidize construction and other housing costs, similar to the island's land bank that preserves open space.

The housing crisis is particularly acute on the Vineyard, where a vast array of homes are rented out by the day or the week during the summer and "shoulder season." Working-class residents are getting priced out. The island's last dry cleaner closed recently because of staffing issues, O'Connell said, and many nurses at **Martha's Vineyard Hospital** need to stay in hospital-supplied housing.

The islanders met with Senate President **Karen Spilka**, in the Senate chambers on Thursday. They also fanned out to various lawmakers' offices to make their case. They wore shirts with the slogan "Gimme Shelter" on them, and dropped off house-shaped cookies.

O'Connell is optimistic that statewide legislation allowing these fees as a local option will get passed in this two-year session, probably as part of a broader omnibus housing bill. It helps that Senator **Lydia Edwards**, a supporter, cochairs the housing committee, and Mayor **Michelle Wu** is pushing a similar option for Boston.

"The pieces seem to be coming together," O'Connell said. "We now have a group of individuals who are fired up and motivated, and we're going to keep them motivated and fired up."